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H1N1 vaccinations urged for families and civilians

Tripler Army Medical Center— While Hawaii was recently ranked sixth in the nation in how well its people got their H1N1 vaccinations, sixth isn't good enough, according to Col. (Dr.) Michael Sigmon, chief of Preventive Medicine for the Army's Pacific Regional Command.

Sigmon estimated that the vaccination rate of Army civilians and military family members is about the same as the 34 percent rate reported by the state for its entire population. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) announced these statistics earlier this month as part of its nationwide survey conducted in February.

Scientific studies show that more than 85 percent of the population needs to be vaccinated for a "herd immunity" to take place, Sigmon said. Herd immunity takes place when enough people are vaccinated, so that when a person comes down with a contagious disease, that person can't spread it to others around him. They are already immune to the disease, and they, in turn, won't spread it further.

While the active duty military population in the Pacific has well above the 95 percent vaccination rate, tracking the Army's civilian employee and family member populations has been challenging, Sigmon noted. He explained that while active duty personnel have their vaccinations entered into their military health records, civilians can get vaccinated in a variety of ways, including the mass vaccinations at military malls or with doctors in private practice. Civilian vaccinations are not as easy to count, because of patient privacy rules and the different ways their health records are maintained.

At a state health department press conference held April 1, the *Honolulu Advertiser* reported Dr. Sara Park, the state epidemiologist, as crediting swine flu clinics conducted in schools last year as helping the state achieve a 55.4 percent vaccination rate among children 6 months to 17 years old.

Like Park, Sigmon strongly urges parents with children under 10 who received a first dose, to bring their children in for the second dose. Park estimated that only 30 percent of children under 10 who got their first dose, followed up and got their second vaccination. The second vaccination is needed to get the full benefit of the vaccine.

The CDC report for Hawaii shows that of adults between 25 and 65 years of age, of those who had health conditions that put them at greater risk of severe H1N1 illnesses, only about 32 percent were vaccinated. Among all others in the 25-65 age category, the vaccination rate was 18.5 percent.

"There still is a possibility that the H1N1 virus can become a serious threat to the health of everyone in Hawaii. The best and simplest protection is still the vaccination," Sigmon said. Contact your primary health care provider or the immunizations clinic at your military installations posted on the "Fight the Flu" webpage on the Tripler Army Medical Center website, www.tamc.amedd.army.mil.

